

A guide on

Why and how to use video in research.



Introduction

Video is a powerful tool and should be utilised in research where appropriate. It can be used to both document and generate research data. Here we provide a guide to the ways in which video can be used in research, why these methods are beneficial and how to use these methods.

Important actions before recording research

Before we begin, it is important to emphasise that the most important rule of recording research, whether it be through a video or sound recording, is to **ask for the participant to give consent to be recorded**. Not everyone is comfortable being recorded and some may not want their answers to be documented in a way which they can be identified. It is also important to adhere to the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) relating to participant recordings. If you want to film your research, you need to:

- Brief the participant on the topic area and your intentions for the research session;
- Inform participants that you intend to record the session;

- Tell the participant why you want to record the session and specifically what the recording will be used for, i.e. to look over for later analysis;
- Inform participants that the footage will remain confidential (their identity and answers will remain confidential) and will be used for research purposes only;
- Ask the participant if they are happy with being filmed;
- Ask the participant for **signed consent to take part in the research and be recorded;**
- Let the participant know that they can stop the recording and/or withdraw their consent and participation at any time.

Filming Research Sessions

What?

Filming research sessions is as straight forward as it sounds. It means simply to record your chosen research method, and is best suited for those which require direct, in-person interaction with the participant(s).

Why?

A video recording can be beneficial for qualitative methods of research, such as focus groups or interviews. It can be difficult to take down notes when conducting these sessions, so it is important that they are recorded in some form. Dictaphones are often used by researchers, as they record answers given by the participants to be transcribed and analysed later. However, this has limitations when working with multiple participants, such as in focus groups. Although you can go back and listen to the recording to pull out key quotes for analysis, it can be difficult to identify who is saying what specifically. This can take some time to find out and ultimately makes both transcribing and analysis more difficult. Using video in research with multiple participants would therefore be beneficial, as it allows you to see who is speaking, therefore eliminating any issues with participant identification. Being able to identify who is speaking helps to ensure accuracy during analysis, which further supports the validity of the research findings.

Filming research allows researchers to re-experience the session, to both identify key themes which were not obvious when facilitating the session and to go back to moments of valuable insight, which were forgotten or difficult to hear. Not only is this beneficial for clarifying what was said, but it also provides the opportunity to monitor participants more closely with regards to their

non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions or body language. These cues are easily missed in the moment and can provide further, more subtle insight and add to the current understanding of key themes. For this reason, it is therefore beneficial to have the opportunity to re-visit the session.

Being able to re-experience the research session and being able to see and hear the quote from the participants themselves also provides the opportunity for researchers to get a second opinion and to see if another researcher has a different interpretation. As the second researcher would be more removed from the situation, they can provide a different perspective that may lead to further insight or share the same opinion as the initial researcher and therefore support their analysis and findings.

Filming research sessions is therefore useful as it not only eliminates the pressure to make notes during the actual session, but also eliminates the difficulty in identifying where key quotes are coming from. It also, through various means, can ensure the accuracy of analysis and in turn support the validity of the findings.

How?

Before beginning to record the session, you need to ensure that you have followed all of the steps outlined in the “important actions before recording research” section above and have made sure that you have consent from everyone to be recorded before starting to record.

It is easy to record your research as long as you have the correct equipment. If conducting a focus group, set up your camera in a location which overlooks the entire group, so that no one is excluded from the video. This will make transcribing and analysis easier later when trying to identify where key quotes came from. If in an interview setting, this camera can either be behind the researcher to capture the experience from the interviewer’s perspective, or to the side and out of view. When planning to record research, consider your camera spots carefully. You want your camera to be as subtle as possible, so as not to distract participants or make them uncomfortable. Make sure to ask the participant how they feel and whether they are comfortable with the camera’s position to reduce any pressure they may feel ahead of the session.

Video Ethnography

What?

This method is defined as: “the video recording of the stream of activity of subjects in their natural setting, in order to experience, interpret and represent behaviour”. Video ethnography involves a researcher following a participant and recording their activities in their natural environment, rather than in a specific focus group or interview setting. These can be activities tailored to follow a particular agenda related to the research topic area or can just be an observation of their everyday life.

Why?

Using video in conducting ethnographic research is beneficial as it provides a more complete record of activities rather than simply taking written notes. Video can capture various interactions and moments which may have been otherwise overlooked by the researcher or participant. The researcher can then look over this footage to find these missed moments, or to gather a more accurate and objective perspective from a position which is removed from the situation. Other researchers can also watch this recording back and give their interpretations of key moments, which may either support existing insight or offer additional insights that differ from the original researcher’s perspective.

Video ethnography is also beneficial to use because it provides a more complete view of experiences and behaviours which may otherwise be difficult to articulate into words. Seeing particular actions take place in the real world may provide deeper insight than if an individual were to give a basic description of this.

How?

Once the participant has been briefed on the topic area and consent has been given (again, by following all of the steps outlined in the “important actions before recording research” section above), you need to liaise with the participant to find a recording day that would be not only best suited for them, but also within your research time scale. You need to explain what it is you will be doing and the reasons for recording them whilst completing a given activity. It would also be a good idea to put together an agenda for the day, based on what the participant knows they will be doing, so that you both have an idea of what will happen, where you will go, and where you can charge your camera if necessary.

Participatory Video Research

What?

These videos are **generated by participants** and can be used as a means to collect data about a topic area within their everyday lives in a setting which they are comfortable with. These can range from sitting down for five minutes to record their experiences with a particular topic area, to going out and actually recording this experience. One topic area in which this research can be used is for smoking through video diaries. At the end of each day, participants can spend five minutes talking about their smoking experience with regards to when and how many cigarettes they smoked, why they smoked these, and how they felt afterwards.

Why?

Participatory video research is not only valuable to the researcher in uncovering themes to understand the given topic area, but also to the participants generating these videos. It offers them a chance to reflect on their behaviours, and perhaps self-identify any problem areas. Further to this, viewing the participant alone in their own environment may produce more honest data, as it removes the participant's fear that they will have to face judgement for their answers, either by the researcher or other participants.

How?

As with all research, consent to take part must be given by the participant, even if they are the ones producing this research. You can ensure that you cover all aspects of consent and GDPR by following all of the steps outlined in the "important actions before recording research" section above.

Before asking the participant to conduct these recordings, you need to let them know exactly what experiences or views they need to document and/or what feedback to give about these experiences. You also need to make it clear to the participant how frequently they are expected to record these and how long for. Video diaries may involve a five-minute reflection at the end of the day, every day, for a week. The frequency of recordings and duration of the study need to be made as easy as possible for the participant to complete. Expecting participants to do a video diary every day for more than a few months is unrealistic; participants may grow tired and feel unable to carry this on.

Conclusion

These are three ways in which video can be used to collect research data. Using these methods provides the opportunity to re-watch the research sessions a number of times and identify any missed insights. They also allow for a second perspective to be given by another researcher, which can help verify existing insights and to also highlight any overlooked insights.

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